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March 10

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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

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By Smith Date 10/24/72

March 26, 1959

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD:

At 5:00 p.m. on March 10 the President met with the following in his study in the Mansion: Congressman John W. McCormack, Congressman Charles A. Halleck, Acting Secretary of State Christian Herter, and Bryce Harlow.

The President first expressed to Mr. McCormack regret in having failed to invite him to attend prior meetings on the Berlin situation. To this Mr. McCormack responded by asking that this omission not be dwelled upon -- that he had simply told the press, when asked, that he had not been invited to earlier meetings, and that he harbored no ill will.

The President then summarized for Congressman McCormack earlier meetings on the Berlin situation which were attended by the House and Senate leadership, beginning with the CIA briefing and in general repeating the entire discussion. He presented the Berlin situation in detail, including possible West German reaction to United States moves. Secretary Herter commented that at a recent committee hearing Senator Morse had sought to make the point that the Chief Executive is likely to take action beyond his constitutional and statutory authority. The President flatly asserted that he would not take action to go to war without first contacting the Congress.

The President then mentioned the considerable volume of trade between East Berlin and East Germany amounting to several hundred million dollars' worth a year, explaining that its stoppage would have a serious economic impact on the city, even though present stockpiles of supplies would suffice for at least six months.

Next the President stressed that we should not now go to any sort of extreme military action, such as partial mobilization. He said that we do not want to, and should not, look upon this situation as "a Berlin crisis"; instead, he said, we can anticipate two or three decades of tension, with the Soviets attempting to get us off balance and so upset that we will act unwisely. In order to keep our allies together, he said, we must hew to a positive position and follow it through no matter whether the strain at any particular moment happens to be acute in Berlin or elsewhere in the world.

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The President advised Mr. McCormack of his belief that hostilities will not ensue. He said that should hostilities begin, the Soviets know that they will suffer unacceptable damage. He said the Soviets know that the United States will unquestionably fight if pressed to it, but they take the position that this would be due to subversion of the American people by our national leadership rather than a reflection of the will of all America.



The President mentioned a talk by Khrushchev in which he expressed no interest in small nuclear weapons and stressed that the Soviets are interested only in the huge weapons.

Congressman McCormack asked about the feasibility of taking the Berlin issue to the World Court. Secretary Herter answered that this has been carefully considered by the State Department and that the consideration is continuing. McCormack mentioned serious weaknesses of the Soviets such as hostility of their conquered peoples. He asked if the West Germans would stand firm in the event of a serious crisis. Mr. Herter answered that Mr. Adenauer is firm enough but that elements of West Berlin are not as firm as we should like.

The President then commented that various people had urged him to invite Khrushchev to visit the United States, but that he had not done so because it could lead both the American and the Russian people to expect unattainable results from such a visit. Now, however, the President said, one inhibition has been removed -- that is, that Macmillan's visit to Khrushchev made it no longer necessary to be concerned over British fear of our acting separately with the Soviet Union if Khrushchev should come here.

The President concluded by saying that an invitation to Khrushchev to come here is still a possible "ace in the hole" in dealing with the Berlin crisis.

Mr. McCormack said that the Democrats agree with the President's firm stand on Berlin but do not believe that America is strong enough militarily. The Congressman said, however, that the President is in far better shape on this issue than Macmillan is in Berlin; here the opposition wants to increase our strength, whereas in Britain Communist and Labor Party spokesmen are on the side of weakness.

The President commented that the easiest thing in the world is to confuse strength with bad deportment. He said we must conduct ourselves so that the world can believe we are conciliatory -- that

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we must always emphasize strength and yet always hold out the hand of friendship if only the Soviets will receive it. Otherwise the world is liable to run away from us in this situation, with the result that we would become fortress America. Mr. McCormack said he is against becoming a garrison state but we might come to it whether we wish to or not. He said that circumstances may force us to it.

The President said if this should come to pass we must decide if we should start fighting right now rather than waiting to go quietly down the drain.

Mr. McCormack commented that he is a strong admirer of the Secretary of State and had publicly said so a number of times.

Mr. McCormack commented favorably on our government not being divided on world affairs. Secretary Herter said that Mikoyan simply couldn't comprehend this fact while he was here -- couldn't grasp our political system.

The President then described his own conversations with Mikoyan -- how Mikoyan was sullen, talked in low tones, his eyes to the floor, adhering strictly to the old Communist line throughout the discussion. The President recited his first experience with Russians of this type when he was the Army's operations chief -- how five days after the Pearl Harbor attack Soviet officers made preemptory demands for antiaircraft artillery, how he wanted to throw them out of the office but was told by General Marshall that he had to get along as best he could with these allies.

The President told Mr. McCormack of his invitation to the Democratic leaders in the prior meetings to get in touch with him at any time to discuss any phase of the world situation when they considered it useful. Mr. McCormack said that he knew the President meant this, but that it is a very troublesome thing to do because Democratic

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leaders can hardly initiate such contacts with a Republican President. He said, however, that whenever the President invited them, they would gladly come.

The President asked, "Well, suppose a new idea came to you on the international situation. Would you or Mr. Sam be loathe to tell it to me or Harlow or someone else on my staff for my information?" Mr. McCormack said that this is different from what he meant and stressed that from time to time he has passed suggestions along to Assistant Secretary of State Macomber.



The President responded by saying that if we are sincere in saying that politics stop at the water's edge, surely there is need to have discussions of certain problems across party lines. He said he did not think all Democrats had tails and horns just because they are so mistaken as to be Democrats. He said he has always made it a point to get along with the political opposition in every possible way on bipartisan matters.

Mr. McCormack swung the conversation back to the World Court, stating that here he was doing exactly what the President was talking about, offering a constructive idea. Secretary Harter repeated that the Counsel of the Department of State is already going into this matter very thoroughly.

Congressman Halleck then commented that, after all, he and McCormack were leaders not of the Executive Branch but of the Legislative Branch -- that here are problems that affect the security of the United States, that Leaders had to do with the formation of opinion, and that he was sure that if the Leaders could contribute to the posture of unity, strength and firmness, they would do so. The President then commented favorably on recent speeches in the Senate and House on these very points. McCormack stressed Lyndon Johnson's recent public statement supporting the President, pointing out particularly that it was delivered at a Democratic banquet.

The President again stressed the importance of mutual security, advising Mr. McCormack of his conversation in a prior meeting with Senator Richard Russell on this same point. After discoursing on the essentiality of this program, the President said that if he should be so unfortunate as to be followed by a Democratic President

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he would give that Democratic President his full support in attempting to carry forward this necessary program. McCormack said he had supported this program all along, and Congressman Halleck sought to draw a parallel of support in the 80th Congress for Mr. Truman's efforts in this same field. At this point Halleck and McCormack engaged in a bit of political badminton relating to the prewar isolationism of Republicans. Mr. McCormack, in the course of this good-natured repartee, mentioned to the President the need to strengthen the Republicans on the Appropriation Committee on the development loan fund supplement. The President replied by asking about Otto Passman's activities. Mr. McCormack attempted to reply by relating the efforts made last year to persuade Mr. Passman to concede to an increase in the mutual security funds in the conference committee between the House and Senate. McCormack said that already this year Passman has promised him and Sam Rayburn to talk with them before he acts finally on the mutual security appropriation.

The President then referred most emphatically to the essentiality of the mutual security program and said he was going to tell the country this entire story all over again. He said it was hard to appreciate the public's lack of information -- then told the story of a taxi driver who had expressed dislike of the President to one of the President's friends, explaining that he had fallen out with the President when the President started stealing patents -- the taxi driver citing as evidence that the President had stolen Admiral Rickover's patent on the nuclear submarine. The President said this is evidence of the level of public understanding of what really goes on in Washington.

The meeting adjourned at 6:00 p. m.




Bryce Harlow

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